

BIG SANDY NEWS.

authorities.

They already controlled these, and were prepared to be or threaten, as they deemed most likely to accomplish their end, any official who stood in the way of their plans for wholesale robbery.

The leaders in the plot stood high in social and political circles.

The settlers had small means of making the outrage upon their rights known, and their cause was, indeed, desperate, and it is small wonder, when in every dwelling at the Slough were women whose eyes were red with weeping, that there should be men whose lips uttered curses, and whose muscles twitched with eagerness to lay hand upon the authors of their woe.

Only a few days before the notices to pay or vacate reached the settlers, Erastus and Lucy had received a letter from Mrs. Parsons saying that they had at last found a probable purchaser for their place.

They would know in a few days, she wrote, and if they sold they should pack up and start for the Slough at once, as they did not wish, even if the purchaser of the property would permit, to remain on the mountain through the winter. It would seem more lonely than ever when the place was no longer their own.

The only thing that would delay their coming, if they sold, was Johnny's health.

The boy had not been as well as common the past summer, and had been quite sick recently, but was getting better now, and she thought would be able to be moved, and if they sold she would take him and start at once by boat, leaving Mr. Parsons to drive across with their household goods, as Erastus and Lucy had done.

The reception of this news had caused much pleasure to the young couple, who were both desirous of having their parents near them.

Lucy was especially anxious for the presence of her mother at this time, and hastened to reply, urging that they sell if they could get anything like a fair price, and that they come at once.

But when the determination of the railroad corporation to rob them of their own home became known to them, they felt it would be better for their parents not to sell, at least for the present; and Lucy again wrote, telling her parents of the difficulty they were in, and that if they had not sold, it might be better not to do so.

It was a hard thing to do, and the poor young wife had often to pause and wipe away the tears that blinded her eyes as she wrote of their troubles—thinking, too, of the sorrow it would bring to the hearts of the old people upon the mountain side.

She was expecting to become a mother soon, and all the sweet joy with which she had been looking forward to the coming of the babe had given place to a terrible fear of what the future might have in store for them all.

Erastus had not been loud in his threats, as had others. Indeed he had not threatened at all; but he was not a man of many words. And she had not forgotten how at the Suscol Ranch, when but a boy, he had taken her mother and Mrs. Litchie with the children,

of which she was one, to a place of safety and then returned to defend the cottage with his life. And now the thought kept coming to her: "What if the company should actually attempt the eviction of the settlers and Erastus should again defend their home, and be killed?"

She tried to put the thought from her, but it kept coming back, each time with increasing strength, until it came almost to be a conviction. She knew, or thought she knew, that if efforts were made at an eviction, her husband would call upon his neighbors to defend their homes with their lives, and would set them the example.

It was a horrible thought. But it came and it clung to her; and though she tried hard not to make her letter to her parents be without a gleam of hope, she yet felt when it was written and sealed that she had failed, and was still further depressed by the thought of the effect it would have upon those to whom it was to be sent; and especially upon her father, who she knew would bear the blow even less stoutly than her mother.

Meantime the verbal sale of the mountain place had been concluded between Mr. and Mrs. Parsons and the gentlemen of whom Mrs. Parsons had written.

They were to receive two thousand dollars cash down, and to give immediate possession; and on the morning but one following that on which Lucy's second letter was mailed, John Parsons started to town with the deed made out and signed by his wife.

He was to meet the purchaser at the court-house in Phippsburg, deliver the deed and receive the money, provided the title was found to be clear, of which there was no doubt in the minds of either party; the abstract, which Blake gave to Parsons when he bought the property, having been shown as proof of that fact when negotiations for the purchase and sale were first begun.

The sky looked clouded, and threatening when he left home, but it soon cleared up, and he found the place on time, and he kissed his crippled boy and his wife and left in good spirits, promising to be home by dark.

On reaching town he put out his horse, saw that he was properly fed, and then started for the court-house.

On his way there he had to pass the post-office, and, stopping to inquire if there was any mail for him, was handed Lucy's letter to her mother.

He recognized the postmark and opened it at once—not a common proceeding with him, for his eyes were no longer good, and even were letters came addressed to himself instead of his wife, he usually preferred to wait until he got home and then have her read them aloud while he ate supper or smoked his pipe and rested.

But now something impressed him with the thought that he had better open the letter. He had a feeling that perhaps all was not right at the Slough.

Perhaps it was because it had been only a few days since they had received a letter from there, and so were not expecting another so soon.

Tearing open the envelope he began to read, but had not proceeded far before his hand trembled so that he could not hold the paper still enough to see the

letters, and he folded it up and put it into his pocket.

He had read enough, however, to understand what had befallen his children.

He knew that they were to be driven from their home, as he and they had so often been before, by the merciless greed of soulless corporations, or combinations of rich men whose hearts had turned to stone beneath the weight of their immense wealth.

For a moment it seemed to him that he should die right there and those who were looking saw him stagger like a drunken man, but he rallied at once and went out without a word.

The thought that the cottage on the mountain side was still theirs, and would afford an asylum for the children, had come to him, and he was hastening to tell the would-be purchaser that under the circumstances they could not let him have the place.

It was fortunate that the bargain was not closed, he thought. How lucky that he had opened the letter instead of waiting until he got home!

(To be continued.)

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